

OBSERVING THE KING'S WORD**NO. 2853****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1903****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON****ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 21, 1877**

*“Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him,
and did hastily catch it.”*

1 Kings 20:33

YOU know the circumstances to which these words refer. The boastful Syrian king had been utterly defeated, and his army destroyed. He himself had fled into an inner chamber in desperate fear of his life, but being informed that the kings of Israel were merciful, he sent certain of his attendants, with sackcloth on their loins and ropes about their necks, in humblest fashion to beg that he might be spared.

When they came in before Ahab, and began to plead with him for Ben-hadad, they watched every word that the king uttered, “The men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him,” and the moment he said, “He is my brother,” they caught at the expression directly. They were in such anxiety about their king that even half a word that indicated tenderness and mercy, brought joy to their hearts.

I think that this narrative contains a great deal of instruction for those who desire to be reconciled to God. If, dear friend, you are conscious of your guilt, and are afraid of being destroyed on account of it, the wisest thing that you can do is to come before the Lord in the attitude of submission. These men put sackcloth upon their loins, and ropes upon their necks to show that they deserved to die, and you must, spiritually, do the same.

Go to God, and humbly confess your transgressions, own that you are absolutely in His hands, and that if He destroys you, He will be just—if He calls you to account for all your iniquities, and even casts you into hell, you cannot impugn the justice of His decision. Yet while you do that, imitate these messengers of Ben-hadad when they came to Ahab, “The men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it.”

I. My first observation in turning this incident to a spiritual use, is that IT IS A PITY THAT AWAKENED SINNERS DO NOT COPY THE EXAMPLE OF THESE MEN.

For first, *there is far too little of diligent observance of what God says in His Word.* Dear friend, if you want to have the pardon of your sin and deliverance from its consequences, it is God alone who can do this for you. Therefore, you ought to endeavor to know all that is to be known about God in order that if there is anything encouraging and hopeful to one in your circumstances, you may know it.

Hence, every anxious inquirer ought to be a diligent searcher of his Bible. If I did not know the way of salvation, I would read that blessed Book from morning till night, and if I had read it through, and yet had not found a verse that spoke peace to my soul, I would resolve to read each chapter, over and over again, with this constant prayer to God, “Lord, show me something that will meet my case—some kind assuring word from Your own inspired Book that may remove my fears and give me peace.”

How can some of you who say that you are seeking the Lord, be at all surprised if you do not find Him, as you are neglecting the diligent searching of His Word? I pray you to read it through and through, again and again, and try if you cannot find a sentence, somewhere or other, that will breathe comfort to your troubled heart. For remember that all your hope lies there, within the covers of this Book is “the glorious gospel of the blessed God,” therefore, be you well acquainted with it and diligently observe if anything has come from the lips of the Lord which may bring deliverance to you.

The same thing ought to be done *when you are hearing the Gospel preached*, for God has been pleased, in order that His truth may be brought home to your hearts, to choose certain of His servants to speak His Word, and so far as they speak in accordance with His mind and will, they speak for God to you. It is a blessed thing when we have hearers who diligently observe whether there is anything in the sermon that will meet their case, and remove their distress.

I know some congregations where they are diligently observing whether there is fine oratory. I bless God that I hate oratory from my very soul. To speak His truth clearly and simply, is all I aim at, so, if you want the beauties of rhetoric, you must seek them elsewhere. There are some preachers who are always looking out for scraps of poetry, or something quaint or curious that they can weave into their discourse, but all this is as the chaff to the wheat.

The sincere seeker after truth continually prays, "Lord, give me something that I may lay hold of. Give me a safe anchorage for my storm-driven vessel. I am in sore trouble of soul, be pleased, O God, to breathe peace to my heart through something that the preacher shall say under the gracious guidance of Your Holy Spirit!" I do not think there will be much preaching in vain when hearers diligently observe what comes from the preacher's lips in the hope that, by God's grace, it may be blessed to them.

Then, again, dear friends, while there is too little of diligent observation of what God has said, *there is also far too little of hastily catching at the Word*. These messengers of Ben-hadad were intently listening to all that Ahab said, so that, as soon as he uttered the one word that gave them a ray of hope, they "did hastily catch it."

Oh, how I long that poor troubled hearts may hastily catch at any word of encouragement that is either recorded in the Bible, or spoken by God's sent servant! How many encouragements some of you have missed through inattention! Sweet promises have been as near to you as the key was to Christian when he was in Doubting Castle, yet you have not perceived them. You have been hungering while the bread was waiting for you upon the table.

Some of you have been thirsting, as Hagar did in the wilderness, when there was a well of water close beside her, but she did not know it. There are sweet words that have set other souls at liberty, and I trust will yet bring you liberty, they have been sounding in your ears again and again, yet for want of hastily catching at them, you have missed the comfort they are intended to convey to you.

I know some who, instead of hastily catching at comforts, are always catching at difficulties. They seem to spend a great part of their time trying to find out why they should not be saved, and they have discovered quite a number of arguments to prove that there is no hope of salvation for them.

How do I know that they act thus? Why, because I have had plenty of practical experience of it when trying to guide them to the Lord Jesus Christ. They will argue this way, and that way, and fifty ways, and when you have answered all their fifty arguments, they just go and discover fifty more. There seems to be no end to their ingenuity in finding stern sentences, and threatening passages, and doctrines that appear to look black upon them.

Well, dear friend, if this is what you have been doing, will you not turn your ingenuity into another direction, and as you read a chapter, will you not say, "If there is anything here that I can catch at, I will do so"? And when you are listening to a sermon, say, "If there is anything that I can lay hold of, I will do so." Say, especially, "Lord Jesus, if there is anything in Your revealed Word—if there is one text, or half a text, that would suit a poor sinner like me—I will not lose it for want of grasping it, but right or wrong, I will have it. I will catch at it, if peradventure, it may bring me peace and pardon."

It is a great pity that those, who are in trouble of soul, do not imitate these messengers of Ben-hadad, but they do not. They neither diligently observe what God says, nor do they readily catch at it. I wonder why this is? Is it because they are not so much in need as these poor men with sackcloth on their loins and ropes around their necks? That is not the case, but it may be that they have not so clear a sense of their need. I have noticed that really hungry people will eat almost anything, and when a man gets driven to self-despair, he eagerly watches for any word that falls from God's mouth, that is at all likely to meet his case. Why is it that those in soul-trouble are not as believing as these Syrians were?

Whatever Ahab said, they caught at it at once and believed it was true, yet he was a sorry specimen of humanity. I do not know anything to his credit. There was only one person who was worse than himself, that was his wife, Jezebel, but with that exception, he was about as bad a character as could be found anywhere, yet these men believed him. It is a sad pity that they believed Ahab, but that some of us will not believe the Lord who cannot lie. God grant us grace to watch carefully for any hopeful word that comes from His lips, and to catch it hastily, for our own comfort, and for His glory!

II. My second observation is this—IT IS VERY STRANGE THAT SINNERS ACT THUS, FOR IT IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH THE USUAL WAYS OF MANKIND.

We have a proverb which says that “drowning men catch at straws.” So they do, and when a man is in peril, he will usually grasp at anything that seems to offer him a hope of escape. How is it then, that with a Bible full of promises and a Gospel full of encouragements, the mass of people with troubled consciences do not at once catch at what God says?

There is another proverb of ours which says that “the wish is father to the thought.” Sometimes a man wishes for a thing so long that at last, he believes it is really his, but how strange it is that, in spiritual things, men wish, and wish, and wish—or say that they do—and yet they do not believe that it is as they wish! The more they wish, the further they seem to be from the blessing they desire to possess.

Alas! how many of you there are who torture yourselves needlessly—who seem to prefer to be troubled rather than be at peace—who see the table of mercy spread before you, yet choose to remain hungry, who behold the rippling rills of the water of life leaping at your feet, yet will not stoop and drink! How odd it is that in other things, men should in their time of trouble, snatch at anything that seems likely to help them—that they should be ready enough to lay hold on any sort of comfort that is dangled before them, and so are often deceived, and yet when their trouble arises from things that concern their soul, they do not catch at the real consolation which God offers them!

I have often noticed, when a person is pleading with me for something he wants—it is but a very simple illustration of something far greater—how ready he is to lay hold of even half a promise. A man asks me to preach in the country and I say, “I really cannot, it is quite impossible.” But he keeps on begging me to go, and gets me to say that I would if I could, and then he interprets that to mean that I shall go, yet I never said anything of the kind, and then, some time afterwards, he writes to say that I promised to preach for him, which I never did, but he tries to make it out somehow that I did.

And I expect that you find it the same when people are begging of you, they will, if they can, get a word of hope from you, and then they lay hold upon it and tell you that you said such and such, yet when we come to deal with God, we will not believe the promises which He has really made to us, some of us seem to be always ready to believe anything against ourselves even though it is not true. It is strange that if we want favors from men, we will plead with them, and twist their words in our own favor, yet when we come to deal with God, and everything is clearly in favor of the coming, seeking, believing sinner, we so often twist it around the other way, instead of catching at what God has really said.

This is the more strange too, because *you can continually see how sinners catch at everything else*. See how they cling to their own righteousness. A thousand tons of it are not worth a farthing, it is neither fit for the land nor yet for the dunghill, yet they prize it as if it were a heap of diamonds. See what confidence many put in utterly worthless forms and ceremonies. And that so-called “priest” with the cross on his back—they are foolish enough to trust in him, and believe that he can do something or other for their soul's salvation.

Anybody who chooses to deceive them will find them ready to become his dupes, yet when GOD comes to them with His exceedingly great and precious promises, they do not catch at them, but rather turn aside from them. Many, as it were, take the pope up in their arms, triple crown and all, yet when the Lord Jesus Christ passes by, they hardly put out their little finger to touch the hem of His garment. They seem as if they could trust even the devil sooner than they could trust their God, for they hope to find pleasure in sin, which is trusting the deceitfulness of Satan, yet when God Himself promises them

eternal life through believing in His own dear Son, they turn their backs upon Him and say, "It is too good to be true, it cannot be possible," or find some other pretext for not catching hold of the gracious promise of God.

There was once a man, an honest man, who verily believed that Christ was an impostor, and therefore he devoted all his powers to the putting down of Christ's teaching and His disciples. He was a man with a large heart, and therefore, when this prejudice had taken full possession of him, he foamed at the mouth, and breathed out threats and slaughter against the church of Christ. He hunted down the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem, and when they fled from him there, he followed them to strange cities, all the while, as a truthful man, carrying out what he believed to be pleasing to God.

It needed only a very few words from heaven to let him know that this Christ, whom he was persecuting in the person of His followers, was indeed the Son of God, and that man, as soon as he had learned that truth, resolved thenceforth to live and die for Him whose servants he had persecuted so ruthlessly.

I believe I am addressing some who only need to know that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, and all their jests and mocking at true religion will be turned into holy penitence, and devoted adherence to the cause which hitherto they have defied. O Lord, send that flash of light to them this very hour! Let them believe in Him who is not only the faithful Witness to the truth, but who is Himself the Truth, for the moment they believe in Him, they shall be saved.

III. My third observation is that **WHEN WE ARE DEALING WITH GOD, THERE IS VERY MUCH TO CATCH AT.**

Many years ago, when I was in great distress of soul, and could not find Christ for a long while, I would have been glad if I had heard anybody speak about how much there is for a troubled soul to catch at. Perhaps I did hear something about it, but if so, I did not catch at it, though I think I should have done so if it had really been made plain and clear to me. Until God the Holy Ghost enlightens the soul, the truth may be put very plainly, but we do not see it. I will try now, to set it before anyone here who is willing to catch at it.

Now, poor troubled soul, if it had been God's purpose to destroy you—if He never intended to hear your prayers—if He never meant to save you—let me ask you, very earnestly—*Why did He give you the Bible?* I want you to catch at this thought. That blessed Book is all about salvation, the good news is fully and freely published there, but if God had resolved never to accept your faith, or to answer your prayers, why did He give you the Bible?

Did He do this merely to tantalize you? What other use can it be to you except to increase your condemnation? What is the good of giving a hungry man the description of a grand dinner if he may not eat it? What is the use of telling a poor beggar, who is shivering in the cold, all about garments that he will be glad to wear when you know, all the while, that he will never be clad in them? That is not God's way of dealing with sinners. The very existence of the Word of God in your hand ought to be looked upon by you as a token of mercy to your soul, so, catch at it.

Again, *why has God raised up a ministry, and given you the opportunity of listening to it?* Why are you continually being warned to flee from the wrath to come? Why are you constantly being instructed in the truths of the Gospel? Why are you invited to come to Christ if He will reject you when you do come? If there is no hope for you who trust in Jesus, why has God sent me to preach to those whom He never intends to bless? I do not believe that it is so and I pray you not to believe it yourselves.

The very fact that the Gospel is still sounding in your ears is the thing you ought to catch at, therefore, go at once to God in prayer and say to Him, "Lord, You have sent me this precious message of hope both in the Bible and by Your servant, will you not accept me now that I seek Your face, and ask forgiveness at Your hands, in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your well-beloved Son?"

I remind you also that *you are still on praying ground.* There are still many precious promises that you can claim, such as this, "He that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Your Lord has told you to pray and not to faint, surely, God has not set up His mercy seat in order that

you may come to it and yet be refused? Do you believe that He bids you pray, all the while knowing in His heart that He never means to hear you? Do you think you would, over and over again in God's Word, be encouraged to seek His face, if He had determined that He would never show that face to you?

I cannot believe such a thing! On the contrary, I think that your poor troubled heart ought to say, "As the Lord bids me pray, He must mean to hear me." It seems clear enough to my mind that it must be so, I trust it will be equally clear to you. Go and use the throne of grace, and I feel sure that you will not use it in vain.

See next, if you cannot catch at this great truth—*God has given Jesus Christ to die for sinners*. You are a sinner, so catch at this glorious fact, "He gave himself for our sins." If it had said that He gave Himself for our righteousness, it would not have helped us, but it is most cheering for us to learn that He gave Himself for our sins. Did Jesus really die for sinful men and because of their sins? Then is there hope for me, a guilty man in whom sins abound, for it is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

If the Lord had meant to destroy you, He would never have sent His Son to die, or sent to you an invitation to come to Him, for God takes no delight in tantalizing His creatures by setting before them that which encourages their hope only to plunge them afterwards into deeper despair. Are you even now despairing of salvation? Then, I urge you to say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." If not a single ray of hope comes to you, yet grasp the cross, and if you perish, perish there. But if you, by faith, do grasp Christ, you shall never perish, for His own declaration is, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

There is another truth that I think some of you might catch at, it is this one, "*God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent*." This was the message that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself preached, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." You know that there is such a thing as saying that which is false by an indirect action as well as by direct speech.

Suppose, for instance, that someone had offended you, and that you should propose to him that he should confess the wrong that he did to you, if you were earnestly to exhort him to come and be at peace with you, suppose that, when he had done so, you were to say to him, "Now you have humbled yourself, and confessed the wrong that you did to me, but I will never forgive you," you would have grossly deceived him and acted a lie, even if you had not actually uttered it, because in the very fact of your asking him to acknowledge the wrong, there was by implication, an assurance from you that you meant to forgive him.

In like manner, I look upon the preaching of the duty of repentance, and the command to repent, as containing within themselves the assurance that whosoever repents shall find free forgiveness at the hand of God.

Then, again, what can be the meaning of that other command, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*," except that, if as a guilty sinner, I come and trust in Christ, I shall be saved? It is even so, indeed, I am saved as soon as ever I do believe in Jesus. "But," says someone, "suppose that I have no right to do that." That cannot be, it has never happened yet and it never shall. At any rate, if I were in your place, I would not ask any question about the matter, but I would come to Christ because He commands me to come to Him, and threatens me with terrible punishment if I do not come. Can you not catch at that?

I do not know where you poor troubled, conscience-smitten souls are sitting—I feel sure that there are some of you here—but wherever you are, it seems to me that I cannot do better than say to you that *the whole Bible is full of promises for you to catch at*. I pray you lay hold of them.

Do not read the Bible through those dark spectacles that you are so fond of wearing, trying to find out all the threatenings there are in it, but read it in a very humble spirit, yet resolving, "If there is any encouragement for such a poor seeking soul as I am, I will find it. O God the Holy Ghost, help me to find it! If the Lord has spoken any word that can cheer me, I will not miss it for lack of believing it, for I will believe everything that He has said, since I know that He cannot lie. If I perish, I will perish with

my finger on His promise, and I will say to Him, 'Thou hast said this, O Lord, now fulfill Your promise to me, for I do trust You to save even me according to Your Word!'" Gracious Spirit, lead many to come to this resolution, and You shall have the praise!

IV. Now lastly, THERE IS MUCH GREATER ENCOURAGEMENT FOR YOU AND FOR ME, THAN THERE WAS FOR THOSE MESSENGERS FROM BEN-HADAD.

For first, suppose Ahab did utter a hopeful word, *He was very deceitful*. Most kings, in those days, were as deceitful as they well could be, one could never believe a word that they spoke, so what if Ahab did say, "Ben-hadad is my brother"? It might mean that he wanted to allure him into his power that he might destroy him. The men did not think of that, but they hastily caught at Ahab's favorable word.

Now, when God speaks, there is no deceit in what He says, He is not treacherous, He has never spoken falsely to any man. Every word of His is as true as the fact of your existence. I wish, sometimes, that I could induce sinners to treat God as they treat those with whom they do business. I wish they would believe His promise as readily as they believe a man's promise, and say to Him, "That is what You have said, and I believe it. Lord, You cannot lie, therefore, fulfill Your promise to me." There would never be a single instance in which your hope would be disappointed. There never has been, and there never shall be, so long as the race of man exists.

Then again, when those men listened to Ahab, *he might have uttered a friendly word without meaning it*. It might have been quite an idle word and he might have said to the messengers afterwards, "You must not lay any stress upon that expression. I merely used a courtly phrase, there is nothing in it." But God never speaks in a trifling or meaningless manner, there is not one idle word of His in the whole of the Scriptures. There is not a promise which has the slightest falseness or exaggeration in it. If God has promised to do a great thing, He will do a great thing. If He has promised a marvelous mercy, it was not a slip of the tongue or a slip of the pen, but He has bound Himself to fulfill it, and He will surely do even as He has said.

It is a great mercy for you and for me, dear friends, that the Bible is so full of solemn "shalls" and "wills" which God will certainly verify. They are all such massive pillars that a soul may well rest its whole weight upon them, or upon any one of them, and rest there for all eternity without fear of falling. I wish, with all my heart, that every poor troubled soul would just lay hold of the promises and say to the Lord, "These are no idle words, fulfill them unto me, I pray You, for Your dear Son's sake!"

There is another lesson to be learned from this incident. These messengers from Ben-hadad said that the kings of Israel were merciful kings, but we know that *God is much more merciful than they were*, for "His mercy endureth for ever." It is no delight to God to see the wicked perish, He would infinitely rather that they should turn unto Him and live. He has no satisfaction in seeing you hopeless and despairing, young man, and it will bring joy to His heart if you will come and cast yourself at His feet, confessing your sin, and believing that He has forgiven it. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," and no one will rejoice more than God Himself will if you do but come unto Him.

I close with this last remark. Those messengers from Ben-hadad might have believed better of Ahab than would have been true, but *you cannot believe better of God than will be true*. I will give you a challenge. There is no saint here who can out-believe God. You know that God never out-promised Himself yet. Some people do, they say they will do wonderful things, but they promise what they cannot perform, or they find it inconvenient to fulfill their pledged word. That never yet happened to the God of heaven and earth, He has never out-promised Himself.

There have been some men who have believed great things of God and have gone a long way in believing, but there has never lived any man who has out-believed God. Come now, and put Him to the test, believe that He can blot out your sin before you leave this place. Trust His Son to do it, and it shall be done. Believe that He will make a new man of you, creating you anew in Christ Jesus, and it shall be done. Believe that He will fill your heart with abounding comfort and overflowing joy, whereas, aforetime, you have been desponding and well-nigh despairing, and it shall be done. Believe that He will

keep you from falling all your life, and present you faultless before His presence with exceeding joy, and it shall be done. Believe that He will be with you in life, and with you in death, and with you at the judgment seat, and with you to all eternity, and it shall be done. You may open your mouth wide, but He will fill it, and when He has filled it, there will be as much more left for others as they will be able to receive. In the name of God, I challenge you to out-believe Him if you can.

“Oh!” says one, “if what you have said is true, I will believe that Jesus can save me, and that He can save me now,

*“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin
Has like a mountain rose;
I know His courts, I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.*

*I’ll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives;
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.”*

He does command your touch, so stretch out your finger. Trust Him and you are saved. Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you because you have believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. Go in peace, for Jesus Christ has made you whole. The Lord be with you! Amen and Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 KINGS 20:1-34

Verses 1-4. *And Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-hadad, thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine. And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.*

This was a king of Israel, meanly crouching before the idolatrous king of Syria. Not after this fashion would David have spoken, or any of those kings who followed the Lord of hosts, but when men forsake God, they soon become cowards. What kingdom or nation shall prosper that casts off the yoke of the Most High?

5-6. *And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; yet I will send my servants unto thee tomorrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hands, and take it away.*

That is always the way with such people, give them an inch, and they take an ell. Ahab had agreed to all that the Syrian king claimed, so now Ben-hadad pushes his advantage. If you ever yield to Satan, you will find him to be a hard taskmaster. You can never yield enough to satisfy him, and if you yield to any sin, whatever it may be, you will find it to be a cruel tyrant to you. If you allow it once to have power over your soul, it will push its advantage further and further, and make your yoke to be exceedingly heavy.

7-9. *Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief: for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not. And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Harken not unto him, nor consent. Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-hadad, Tell my lord the king, All that*

thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do: but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again.

Driven to extremity, Ahab showed that he had a little courage left, and when he was supported by his people, and possibly, urged on by them, he put his foot down, and would not altogether submit to Ben-hadad. Oh, that men had the moral courage to revolt against sin! Would that, when they felt its cruel bondage, they would resist it! God grant them grace to do so, and strengthen them in their resistance!

10. *And Ben-hadad sent unto him, and said, The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.*

As much as to say, “I will bring so many against you that all the dust of the city would not be enough to furnish a handful each.”

11. *And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*

That was a sharp shrewd check to the boasting of the Syrian king.

12-15. *And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city.*

And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD. And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou. Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand.

All the volunteers that were ready for the war, they were only seven thousand.

16-18. *And they went out at noon. But Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out of Samaria. And he said,—*

In his drunken fury, “he said,”—

18. *Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive.*

They were not to be so easily taken as Ben-hadad imagined.

19-21. *So these young men of the princes of the providences came out of the city, and the army which followed them. And they slew every one his man: and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.*

God has ways and means of delivering His people at His own time. I wish all the young men of our churches had the high ambition to be serviceable to the Lord of hosts. These young princes were a very small band of soldiers, but they led the way, and smote the drunken monarch and his troops, and if our young men, full of holy zeal and ardor, had confidence in God, and went forth every one to slay his man—by which I mean, each one to win a soul to Christ—what glorious victories would be won for the truth as it is in Jesus!

22. *And the prophet came to the king of Israel, and said unto him, Go, strengthen thyself, and mark, and see what thou doest: for at the return of the year the king of Syria will come up against thee.*

Another year would bring another war, so they must be prepared.

23. *And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.*

It was a current heathenish idea, that there was one god for a mountain, another for a stream, another for a plain, and these men imagined that the glorious JEHOVAH was a local deity like their images were supposed to be.

24. And do this thing, Take the kings away, every man out of his place, and put captains in their rooms:

“Do not let the kings, who have their own armies, govern them, for that creates divisions in the camp, but appoint captains in their place.”

25-27. And number thee an army, like the army that thou hast lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot: and we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. And he hearkened unto their voice, and did so. And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians, and went up to Aphek, to fight against Israel. And the children of Israel were numbered, and were all present,—

That is a grand record. It shows the kind of men they were. I wish that all our church members were present at all our prayer meetings, and on all occasions when work is to be done for Christ. What a healthy condition the church would be in if it could be said, “The children of Israel were numbered, and were all present,”—

27. And went against them: and the children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids;

A herd of goats was seldom very large, and the whole of the Israelites put together seemed only “like two little flocks of kids;”—

27-28. But the Syrians filled the country. And there came a man of God, and spake unto the king of Israel, and said, Thus saith the LORD, Because the Syrians have said, The LORD is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

See how good came to Israel through the blasphemy of the Syrians! Whenever there is a rather worse book than usual brought out against the religion of Jesus Christ, or a more than ordinary villainous blasphemy is invented against the grace of God, you may almost clap your hands, and say, “Now will God bestir Himself for His truth and for righteousness’ sake. These men will provoke Him so that He will arise, and defend His own cause.”

29-32. And they pitched one over against the other seven days. And so it was, that in the seventh day the battle was joined: and the children of Israel slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day. But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; and there a wall fell upon twenty and seven thousand of the men that were left. And Ben-hadad fled, and came into the city, into an inner chamber.

And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life. So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, Thy servant Ben-hadad—

There is a wonderful difference between this language and the way in which he had previously spoken. “Thy servant Ben-hadad”—

32. Saith, I pray thee, let me live. And he said, Is he yet alive? he is my brother.

When a man leaves his God, he cannot distinguish between his foes and his friends, so that, oftentimes, those who would do him the direst mischief he reckons to be his brothers.

33-34. Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy brother Ben-hadad. Then he said, Go ye, bring him. Then Ben-hadad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot. And Ben-hadad said unto him, The cities, which my father took from thy father, I will restore; and thou shalt make streets for thee in Damascus, as my father made in Samaria. Then said Ahab, I will send thee away with this covenant. So he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.

Ahab actually made a treaty of peace with him, and let him live to plot incalculable mischief against the nation.

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